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ABSTRACT

This guide provides teachers with a nine-step process to empower students to plan and implement civic participation projects in their community. The guide lists the materials students need and outlines the procedures for guiding students in the civic action project. It suggests that the teacher: (1) decide on a project in advance; (2) introduce the project; (3) preview the steps; (4) select a problem; (5) research the problem; (6) decide on an action project; (7) plan the project; (8) do the project; and (9) evaluate the project. The guide presents six basic steps for any action project, discusses how to work out a project plan, and offers twelve project ideas. The material concludes with a list of government and community (11), volunteer service (5), and private (8) organizations concerned with violence. (BT)

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Implementing a Civic Action Project WebLesson

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WEBLESSON

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Implementing a Civic Action Project

Overview

In the face of a crisis such as the shootings at Colorado's Columbine High School, a natural disaster, or civil strife, students often feel helpless and fearful. It is important to provide them with opportunities to get involved and help address the needs of the community. This short guide provides teachers with a nine-step process for empowering students to plan and implement civic participation projects in the community.

List of Student Materials

You can download this material and distribute it to students as suggested below or students can obtain the material from the web as needed. The student material consists of the following:

The Six Basic Steps of an Action Project. This gives students an overview of the six steps they will have to take to complete a project: (1) select a problem to work on, (2) research the problem, (3) choose a project, (4) plan the project, (5) do the project, and (6) evaluate what you've done.

Project Plan. This helps students with the most difficult and important step—planning the project. It provides a step-by-step guide for planning a project and filling out a project plan.

Project Ideas. This is a list of projects designed to address issues of violence, terrorism, and healing.

Organizations Concerned With Violence. A list of places to look for information and support around issues of violence in your own community.

A good additional resource, which helps guide students through the

whole process of a service project, is the *ACT Field Guide*. It is a 200-page student-friendly book.

Procedures for Guiding Students in a Civic Action Project

(1) Decide in advance:

How much class time can students spend on a project?

Will you limit the project to school or can students do a project that requires them to go off-site?

Will the whole class do one project or will separate groups do their own project?

Will you decide on a project in advance and guide the students to choose that project, or will you give the students several projects to choose from, or will you let the students decide for themselves on a project? (Note: The more decisions students make themselves, the greater their buy-in to the project.)

(2) Introduce the project. Explain to your students that they are going to do an action project to help their community. Set the guidelines (time, place, manner) for their projects. It's also a good idea to assign students to keep individual journals about the project. This will aid your individual evaluation of the students.

(3) Preview the steps. Distribute **The Six Basic Steps of an Action Project** to the class and discuss the basic steps on an action project.

(4) Select a problem. Brainstorm a list of community problems. Have students meet in small groups, select the three top problems, and report back to the whole class. Get a class consensus on the problem that students want to work on.

(5) Research the problem. Your students' research will depend on what problem they select and what they need to find out. In general, they should look for answers to four questions:

What causes the problem?

What are its effects on the community?

What is being done about the problem?

Who is working on the problem or interested in it?

They should also be looking for ideas for action projects.

Students should report to the class what they discover. To find answers, they can:

Invite community experts to speak to the class on the problem.

Interview experts.

Look in the library.

Explore the media—watch television news, listen to radio news, read the newspaper, or search the Internet.

(6) Decide on an action project. Distribute **Project Ideas** and discuss them. The class can brainstorm additional project ideas. Then in groups, they can select the top three ideas. Regroup the class and decide on a project.

(7) Plan the project. Have students read **Project Plan**. If teams are doing different projects, have each team submit a plan filled out on paper. If the whole class is doing the same project, you can plan the project as a whole group or you can assign a committee to submit a Project Plan for the whole class to review.

(8) Do the project. If the whole class is doing the project, tasks may be divided among committees with a project coordinating committee overseeing the entire project.

(9) Evaluate the project. Have students do a formal evaluation of the project's success. Have them also evaluate how well they planned, how well they worked as a team, and what they learned from the project.

The Six Basic Steps of an Action Project

Here are six basic steps you can use for any action project.

Step 1: Select a Problem. Get your group together and discuss what community problems concern you. Make a list and choose one problem to focus on. To help you decide, ask the following questions: Which problem affects your community the most? Which would be most interesting to work on? Which could be worked on most easily? Which would you learn the most from?

Step 2: Research the Problem. The more you know about a problem, the more you'll understand how to approach it. Try to find out as much as you can about these questions:

What causes the problem?
What are its effects on the community?
What is being done about the problem?
Who is working on the problem or is interested in it?

To find answers to these questions, try the following:

Use the library. Look up newspaper and magazine articles. Ask the reference librarian for help.

Interview experts. Call local government officials. Find people at non-profit organizations that work on the problem.

Survey community members. Ask questions of people you know.

Step 3: Decide on an Action Project. Think of project ideas that would address the problem your team has chosen. Make a list. As a team, decide on the top *three* project ideas. Think about the pros and cons of each project idea. Evaluate each in terms of your available time, materials, and resources. Select the most suitable one.

Step 4: Plan the Project. To prevent false starts or chaotic results, you need a plan. See **Project Plan** for details.

Step 5: Do the Project.

Step 6: Evaluate the Project. While implementing the project, it's important to evaluate—to think about how you are doing and figuring out how you can do things better. At the end of the project, you'll want to evaluate how you did. To make evaluating easy, you'll need to plan for it. See **Project Plan** for details. In addition to evaluating the project's results, be sure to examine how well your group worked together and what you learned as an individual.

Project Plan

Planning is an important step in an action project. You may want to get out there now and make some waves. But hold on. If you take the time to plan now, you will save time, energy, money, and heartbreak because you'll know where you're going and how to get there. The more time you spend on planning, the less time your project will take.

Make your project plan on paper. Your plan will have nine parts. Before you begin planning, read through all nine parts. You'll want all the parts of the plan to fit together and support each other.

Part 1. Project Name. Invent a catchy name for your project. Use it on

anything you create for the project—fliers, posters, letterhead, etc.

Part 2. Team Members. Write the names of your team members down. It's good to start thinking about the strengths and talents of each team member so you can make use of everyone on the project.

Part 3. Problem Statement. Try to describe your problem with a single sentence. This is hard to do, but describing your problem clearly and simply can help you focus on what you can do about it. Then briefly write what else you know about the problem by answering the following questions:

What causes the problem?
What are its effects on the community?
What do people affected by the problem want done?

Part 4. Goals. Describe your goals. Be specific and practical. Can you achieve your goals? Keep your goal statement clear and simple, like your problem statement. Goals help chart your course. If you know where you want to go, you can usually determine how to get there.

Part 5. Project Description. Describe your project in two or three sentences. Look at your problem statement and goals. How will your project deal with your problem and address your goals? Describing your project clearly and simply can give you a chance to think about what you are going to do, how you are going to do it, and why.

Part 6. Resources. List different individuals or organizations who might help you with your project. Government, non-profit, and business organizations may be working on the problem or interested in it. Tap into these resources.

Part 7. Action Steps. Your goal tells you where you're going. What steps will you take to get there? Write down the details of your plan. Explain how the project will work.

Part 8. Task Chart. Once you have decided on the steps to your plan, break down the steps into tasks. Try to think of everything that needs to be done. Then assign people jobs that they want to do and *can* do. Put someone in charge of reminding people to do their tasks. Set a deadline, or due date, for each task.

Part 9. Evaluation Plan. Take time now to figure out how you are going to measure the success of your project. There are several ways to evaluate a project. Pick the best ways and figure out how to do it for your project.

Before-and-After Comparisons. You can show how things looked or how people felt before your project, then show how your project caused changed. You might use the following to make comparisons: photos, videos, survey results, or test scores.

Counting and Measuring. You can count or measure many different things in a project. For example: How many meetings did you have? How many people attended? How many voters did you register? How much time did you spend? Numbers like these will help you measure your impact on the community.

Comparisons With a Control Group. You may be able to measure your project against a control group—a comparable group that your project does not reach. If, for example, you are trying to rid one part of town of graffiti, you could compare your results to another part of town with the same problem.

Project Ideas

You may want to help your community prevent violence from happening or to help community members heal from the effects of violence. Working together, students, teachers, and concerned citizens can develop projects to help the community. Here are a few project ideas to get you started, but keep in mind that often, the most effective projects are those you create yourself.

1. Organize a community forum about violence prevention or healing from violence. Invite experts with different viewpoints to take part in classroom discussions or public debates.
2. Organize a counseling project at a local teen center or other non-profit organization to discuss the causes, effects, and alternatives to violence.
3. Start a conflict-resolution program to train students as conflict managers to help others resolve conflicts non-violently. Use student expertise.
4. Create a school-wide understanding program to encourage better relations among groups.
5. Survey student attitudes toward violence and intergroup relations.
6. Hold a speech contest on violence prevention. Have three winners speak at other schools or at community events.
7. Organize a community heroes day for police, fire department and other community rescue workers. Invite rescue workers to speak in classrooms.
8. Approach local radio stations to create a talk-radio program for young people to discuss their responses to violence with trained counselors.
9. Start a column on violence prevention in your school or local newspaper.
10. Set up a web site on violence prevention.
11. Organize a student grand jury to review an incident of terrorism and its effect on the community.
12. Create a drama about violence and healing.

Organizations Concerned With Violence

You're not alone. Look around. You will probably find other individuals and groups in the community who want to help prevent violence or help community members heal from violence.

Government and Community Organizations

Health Departments (county, state, federal)
Social Service Agencies (county, state)
Mental Health Agencies (county, state)
Police Departments (local, county, state)
Neighborhood Watch (local, state)
Judicial Systems and Justice Departments (local, county, state, and federal)
Fire Departments (local)
Housing Authorities (county, state)
Secondary and Elementary Schools (local, county)
Neighborhood Associations (local)
Tenants Associations (local)

Volunteer Service Organizations

Salvation Army (local, national)
Goodwill Industries (local, national)
National Network of Runaway and Youth Services (local, national)
Big Brother/Big Sister (local, national)
Medical Associations (local)

Private Organizations

NAACP (local, national)
The Urban League
Churches, Religious Organizations (local, national)
Colleges and Universities (local, state)
Local Businesses
Media (local newspapers, radio and television stations)
YMCA/YWCA (local, state, national)
Professional Sports Organizations (local)

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